

Sabbath and Marriage *by Linda Hoff-Hagensick*

I have always been intrigued by the rhythms of work and rest. Being a worknik myself—which is a funky way of saying workaholic—probably explains why. In our culture it may sound noble, but it's actually a cruel and punishing way to live. Everyone I know is on fast forward.

When I picked up the book *Sabbath: The Day of Delight* by Rabbi Abraham E. Millgram for 75 cents at the used book corner of my library, I did not know what I was in for. This book has become my friend and advisor.

The book describes a prescribed period of time where work is prohibited. By God, no less. Preparations for food and other necessities are completed in advance. It is a sacred day of rest.

The Sabbath starts at sundown and ends the following sundown. It opens with a prayer, lighting of candles, fresh bread *challah*, flowers on a white tablecloth and a homemade meal. Parents bless their children and prayers are said over the Sabbath meal using wine and spices.

In the words of a Jewish sage that I read, *The Sabbath is a day about being not doing*. It's a day of re-charging our batteries—spiritually, physically and psychically so that we can go back in the world renewed and refreshed.

In case you are wondering, I am not Jewish. Discovering the Jewish observance of the Sabbath was like falling down a rabbit hole for me that opened into a whole new world. It is a breath of fresh air in a caffeinated world that is always on fast forward.

Your time perception changes and 24 hours feels like forever. One Christian theologian calls the Sabbath *a Cathedral in time*. Rabbi Heshel calls it a preview of eternity.

How does all this relate to marriage? you may be wondering by now. I googled sex and the Sabbath. I discovered that sex is not only allowed on the Sabbath, it is encouraged and endorsed. In fact it is a mitzvah.

Consistent with enjoying food, rest, family and other delights, sex between a married couple is one of the delights of the Sabbath. I have come to think of sex as the glue that holds married couples together. How sweet is it that sex has been a part of this ancient practice for centuries. A truly profound book on the subject of marriage for people of all faiths is *Sex, God and the Sabbath* by Rabbi Alan S. Green.

You may wonder what I am thinking as a marriage therapist. The answer is Shabbat Shalom. Have an awesome Sabbath. Go for it and your marriage will flourish, in fact it will be a little preview of heaven on earth. I have it on very good authority.

Prayer:

Dear God, who created us to live in community and thrive,

We give thanks for our sexuality and the gifts that are connected. We pray for marriages and relationships where the gift of sex is distorted or misused. May our own relationships be blessed as we grow close to our partners and may we find ways to encourage healthy relationships. Thank for your gift of Sabbath where we can truly appreciate all of the gifts you have given us to help our relationships flourish!

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. Are there any traditional Jewish ways of celebrating the Sabbath that you have tried or would like to try? What do they mean to you as a Christian?
2. Do you ever feel like you and your spouse don't have time for sex during the workweek? What about on the Sabbath?
3. Making love with your spouse on the Sabbath is considered a mitzvah—a good deed endorsed by God. What other positive ways can you reconnect with your spouse on the Sabbath?